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SUBJECT: CHINESE AMBASSADOR ON PREMIER'S VISIT, HISTORY
ISSUES, NORTH KOREA

Classified By: Amb. J. Thomas Schieffer. Reason: 1.4 (b,d)

11. (C) Summary: China hopes the upcoming visit by Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao will help to stabilize its relations with Japan and to clarify Japanese thinking on the future nature of their bilateral relations, according to Chinese Ambassador to Japan Wang Yi. Wang stressed that joining the "consensus" on history issues would benefit Japan's relations with China and its other Asian neighbors. He warned that a visit by Japanese Prime Minister Abe to the Yasukuni Shrine would damage Japan's relations with China "greater than in the Koizumi era." Nevertheless, he indicated that China had become less vocal about the possibility of Japan changing Article Nine in its constitution. Wang praised recent U.S. handling of the question of financial sanctions on North Korea and acknowledged the importance of North Korea actively addressing the problem of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea. End summary.

Chinese Premier's Visit

12. (C) Meeting with Ambassador Schieffer on April 5, Chinese Ambassador to Japan Wang Yi said the visit of PRC Premier Wen Jiabao had three main goals. First was to work further toward putting Japan-China relations on a stable track. The second objective, Wang noted, was to confirm what Prime Minister Abe had meant during his visit to Beijing in October 2006 about establishing a "strategic, mutually beneficial, cooperative" relationship. Finally, Wang said the visit would be used to identify possible new areas of cooperation between China and Japan.

13. (C) Abe represents a new generation of Japanese politician who is looking for a more "equal" relationship between Japan and other countries, Wang observed. Although Abe may have felt that China had taken a view of Japan as less than China's equal, Wang stressed, this was a misunderstanding of China's position. As a result, China, he indicated, had quickly agreed to Abe's concept of strategic, mutually beneficial, cooperative relations. China understands

the Japanese desire to be a more "normal" country, Wang said, and hoped to turn the "vicious circle" the relationship had fallen into during the Koizumi years into a positive "benign circle" for the future.

History Issues

14. (C) Nevertheless, Wang emphasized, if Japan wants to be considered a normal country, it should adhere to the consensus view of other countries on various issues, including those related to history. He pointed to the exhibits at the Yushukan, the museum attached to the Yasukuni Shrine, as an example of a challenge to the consensus view of history. The issue of "comfort women" was another subject that, if played up by some in Japan, would not serve Japanese interests. Revisiting the past in this regard would not be good for Japan, Wang stated. Calling the Ambassador a good friend of Prime Minister Abe, Wang asked whether Abe's views on history issues had actually changed since he became Prime Minister or whether Abe was simply taking whatever stance seemed politically advantageous. Wang noted that Abe had not visited Yasukuni since becoming Prime Minister and expressed the hope that he would not visit the shrine in the future.

15. (C) The Ambassador observed that, with respect to former Prime Minister Koizumi's visits to the Yasukuni Shrine, both Japan and China may have put themselves into difficult positions from which they could not easily back away. Issues related to history needed to be addressed, he noted, but had to be addressed in a

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way that is not destructive to overall relations among the countries concerned. The Ambassador added that, with Japan-China relations improving, Abe does not appear to want to depart from a model for the relationship that is working. That said, however, if it appears that China is ordering Abe not to visit Yasukuni, then the domestic political pressure on him to visit the shrine would increase. Wang agreed with the Ambassador's analysis, noting that, based on the results of opinion polls in Japan, the improvement in Japan-China relations had given Abe "political capital" that he would not want to lose. Wang expressed the hope that with Japan-China relations on a steady track, the United States, Japan, and China could engage in a three-way strategic dialogue on how to shape the future of the northeast Asian region.

North Korea

16. (C) Noting what he viewed as a more flexible stance on the part of the United States, Wang praised the U.S. posture towards the Macanese authorities' freezing of North Korean bank accounts in Macao's Banco Delta Asia. "The Chinese people, the Chinese leadership, and the world" had taken note of the clear sincerity of U.S. efforts to resolve that problem. Asked by the Ambassador whether North Korea would follow through on its commitments, Wang replied that the North Koreans would find it difficult to retreat from the more cooperative course they have taken. Now, it was necessary to wait for the result of North Korea's internal discussions. Wang observed that, because North Korea is a small country, once it advances along on a particular course, it can not easily retreat. The key then, Wang stressed, was for North Korea to take the first step as soon as possible, i.e., cease the production of nuclear weapons. If the other parties insist the North Koreans take all other measures required at one time,

however, they are unlikely to stop their weapons production. Moreover, progress toward denuclearization, Wang added, did not depend on North Korean actions alone. This will be a long process, in which the efforts of the United States and China will be particularly important, he indicated.

Abduction Issue

¶7. (C) The North Koreans give other issues higher priority than resolving the problem of Japanese citizens abducted by North Korea, Wang said. Nevertheless, he acknowledged that it must be addressed because of the domestic political importance in Japan and to Prime Minister Abe in particular. The North Koreans had been unwilling to engage on the abduction issue, but China had assisted to establish a working group under the Six Party Talks to discuss the problem. Wang indicated two channels exist to address the abduction issue. One is through the Six-Party process, where the abduction issue could be put on the table for discussion in sequence, following the resolution of matters of higher importance to North Korea. The other channel was bilateral discussions between Japan and North Korea. This latter channel, Wang stressed, would probably need to be utilized secretly, away from the media. China could not

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recommend this course to the Japanese directly, however, because the abduction issue had become so highly politicized in Japan. Wang felt that, with the apology by Kim Jong Il for North Korea's actions in the past, the more general problem regarding the abductions had already been resolved. What remained were very specific questions, he noted.

¶8. (C) The Ambassador emphasized that resolution of the abductions question was a "threshold issue" for Japan that North Korea must address in order to keep

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Japan engaged in the Six-Party process. Resolution would, in fact, enable the Japanese to take steps that would benefit North Korea. Wang said that the Chinese had given the same message to the North Koreans because lack of progress on the abductions issue affected cooperation from Japan.

Abe's U.S. Visit

¶9. (C) Asked about Prime Minister Abe's upcoming visit to the United States, the Ambassador noted that the main goal of the visit would be to demonstrate the close personal ties between the President and Prime Minister. Chinese Embassy Political Minister-Counselor Ma Jisheng queried whether the U.S. side planned to raise the history issue with Abe. The Ambassador noted that Abe had stated his commitment to the so-called "Kono Statement" which conveyed Japan's apology on the "comfort women" issue during his recent telephone conversation with President Bush and interpreted that as a sign that the Prime Minister was looking to cool down the discussion on history issues.

Hu Jintao Visit to Japan: Warning on Yasukuni

¶10. (C) DCM Donovan asked what conditions might need to be fulfilled for Chinese President Hu Jintao to visit Japan. Wang responded that a visit by Hu was largely just a matter of timing. Although it would be natural for Hu to visit this year, taking advantage of the thirty-fifth anniversary of the establishment of

full diplomatic relations between Japan and the People's Republic of China, it would be best if Abe first made another trip to China, following the visit by Premier Wen. It would be difficult for the Chinese to have their Premier and then their President visit Japan consecutively without an intervening return visit by the Japanese leader, Wang observed.

¶11. (C) As for conditions, Wang stated, as long as Abe did not visit the Yasukuni Shrine, no other issues would be likely to prohibit a future visit by President Hu to Japan. He warned, however, that if Prime Minister Abe visited the shrine, "the damage to relations would be greater than in the Koizumi era and would cast a heavy cloud over the region." Wang expressed the hope that Japan, China, and the United States would be able to focus on more significant issues than history such as denuclearization and developing a "peace mechanism" for the Korean Peninsula and creating a new Northeast Asia security framework.

Future U.S.-Japan Relations: What Does the U.S. Want?

¶12. (C) Wang then queried the Ambassador about the future of the U.S.-Japan relationship, noting that some rightist politicians in Japan, particularly among Abe's own younger generation, had called for a more equal, more "independent" Japan vis-a-vis the United States. The Ambassador responded that the relationship between Japan and the United States had no major difficult issues and stressed that the strength of U.S. relations with Japan benefited U.S. interactions with other countries in the region including China. The U.S.-Japan alliance, in particular, did not pose a threat to China, the Ambassador noted. He acknowledged that some right-wing members of Abe's party had advocated more distance in Japan-U.S. relations but added that Abe did not belong to that group, which was very vocal but small in number.

¶13. (C) Wang expressed the concern that in the past 1-2 years more Japanese had begun calling for a revision of the post-World War II "regime" that had

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been imposed on Japan and wondered what the United States might "accept" with respect to this revision. The Ambassador said the United States welcomes Japan speaking with a louder voice in international affairs even though this admittedly might lead to some anxiety in the East Asia region. In terms of the U.S.-Japan alliance, however, the United States sought a "transparent and constructive" arrangement that did not threaten any other countries in the region.

China Quieter on Possible Constitutional Amendment

¶14. (C) Wang replied that China has no problem with the Ambassador's formulation of the U.S.-Japan alliance but asked what the U.S. reaction would be if Japan amended Article Nine of its constitution, the so-called "pacifist clause." The Ambassador indicated that the United States views the amendment of the Japanese Constitution as Japan's own affair and stressed that the United States does not and can not dictate to Japan on such matters. Wang replied that the United States "may have noticed" that China, too, had taken a more low-key position on the question of Japan possibly changing Article Nine. Nevertheless, the Chinese still wanted Japan to retain the provision, he stressed.
SCHIEFFER